

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, UK, EI

SUBJECT: PESSIMISM OVER NI ELECTION RESULTS

SUMMARY: GOI AND LOCAL PRESS BELIEVE RESULTS OF NI ELECTION MAY FIRST WERE FULLY AS BAD AS EXPECTED. NO DUBLIN SOURCE FORESEES ANY STABLE POLITICAL SOLUTION EMERGING FROM CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION DOMINATED BY HARD-LINE LOYALISTS. GOI IS CLEARLY PUZZLED AS TO PROPER COURSE OF ACTION. WHATEVER ELSE GOI DECIDES UPON, WE ASSUME IT WILL MAINTAIN ITS STRONG INTEREST IN KEEPING BRITISH TROOPS ON THE SCENE AS THE ONLY VIABLE FORCE THAT CAN PREVENT A MASSACRE OF CATHOLICS.

1. MCCOLGAN, OF FONOFF ANGLO-IRISH DIVISION, GAVE US AN INITIAL AND HIGHLY PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT MAY 5 OF NI CONVENTION ELECTIONS. HE SAID THAT HE COULD NOT STATE DEFINITIVE GOI POLICY PENDING OUTCOME OF CABINET MEETINGS. WE ASSUME THIS WAS REFERENCE TO CONFUSION PROMPTED BY CONOR CRUISE-O'BRIEN'S STATEMENT, WHICH IS REPORTED IN PARA FOUR BELOW. MCCOLGAN'S COMMENTS, HOWEVER, LEFT NO DOUBT THAT NI SITUATION LOOKS VERY BAD IN DUBLIN. HE WAS NOT AT ALL SURPRISED BY ELECTION RESULTS: THE LOYALIST WIN OF 46 SEATS IS WITHIN THE RANGE OF HIS FORECAST WELL BEFORE THE ELECTION (DUBLIN 692). HE THOUGHT THE HARD-LINE LOYALIST CONTROL OF AN EASY MAJORITY OF SEATS COULD ONLY BE INTERPRETED AS A VICTORY FOR OLDFASHIONED PROTESTANT SUPREMACY. SUCCESSFUL LOYALIST CANDIDATES EVEN INCLUDE FOUR OR FIVE WHO ARE ACTIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH PARAM-
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ILITARY ORGANIZATIONS. IN EFFECT, SOURCE SAID, A MAJORITY OF NI

VOTERS HAVE APPARENTLY GIVEN NOTICE THAT THEY WOULD PREFER TO RESORT TO THE GUN IF THEY CANNOT KEEP THE CATHOLICS DOWN BY TRADITIONAL POLITICAL MEANS. IT LOOKS VERY MUCH AS IF "ULSTER HAS LEARNED NOTHING" FROM THE VIOLENCE OF THE LAST FEW YEARS.

2. SOURCE SAW SOME SLIGHT GROUNDS FOR ENCOURAGEMENT IN MODERATE VOTING PATTERN OF CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, EVEN THOUGH CATHOLICS AND MODERATE PROTESTANTS TAKEN TOGETHER FAILED TO WIN ENOUGH SEATS TO HAVE MUCH BARGAINING POWER. SOURCE NOTED THAT CATHOLICS HAD NOT ELECTED A SINGLE EXTREMIST. THE "OFFICIAL" SINN FEIN/IRA PERFORMANCE WAS "DERISORY," WITH NO CANDIDATE COMING CLOSE TO WINNING A SEAT. THE PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN/ IRA BOYCOTT HAD CERTAINLY FRIGHTENED MANY PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE POLLS AND HAD PROBABLY RESULTED IN THE DEFEAT OF AT LEAST THREE SDLP CANDIDATES. WHILE THE PROVOS CAN INTIMIDATE, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO SIGN THAT THEY CAN ACTUALLY WIN ANY SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VOTES. IN EFFECT, SOURCE THOUGHT CATHOLIC COMMUNITY HAD SHOWN THAT IT IS PREPARED TO ENGAGE IN MODERATE POLITICS.

3. IN PASSING, SOURCE NOTED THAT APRIL HAD BEEN ONE OF THE MOST VIOLENT MONTHS IN NI HISTORY, EVEN THOUGH IRA GENERALLY MAINTAINED ITS CEASEFIRE. HE CONSIDERED THIS RANDOM VIOLENCE A VERY BAD SIGN FOR PROSPECTS IN FUTURE.

4. MINISTER CONOR CRUISE-O'BRIEN, IN ANOTHER OF HIS CONTROVERSIAL POLICY STATEMENTS, TOLD A RADIO INTERVIEWER ON MAY 4 THAT HE DID NOT THINK DUBLIN OR LONDON HAD IT IN THEIR POWER TO BRING NI POWER-SHARING INTO BEING. THE LOYALIST MAJORITY IN CONSTITUTIONAL ELECTIONS EXCLUDED THE POSSIBILITY. HE ALSO THOUGHT THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF GIVING "THE IRISH DIMENSION" ANY "INSTITUTIONAL FORM," ALTHOUGH IT EXISTED AS A FACT OF LIFE. AT SAME TIME, HE SAID THAT GOI WAS OPPOSED TO AN EXCLUSIVELY LOYALIST EXECUTIVE. IT WAS, HE SUGGESTED, NO LONGER A QUESTION OF ACHIEVING A POWER-SHARING EXECUTIVE BUT OF AVOIDING THE EMERGENCE OF A NON-POWER-SHARING EXECUTIVE OR OF A UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. HE THOUGHT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT KNEW THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANY PULL-OUT FROM NI WOULD BE CIVIL WAR AND HEAVY CASUALTIES. BRITISH GOVERNMENT SURELY DID UNDERSTAND THIS AND WOULD NOT WISH TO WITHDRAW IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. NEVERTHELESS, HE BELIEVED ELECTION RESULTS HAD INCREASED THE DANGER OF A PULLOUT.

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5. CRUISE-O'BRIEN'S STATEMENT THAT POWER-SHARING CANNOT NOW BE ACHIEVED HAS DRAWN STRONG CRITICISM FROM PADDY DEVLIN OF THE SDLP (AN OLD FOE). FIANNA FAIL LEADER JACK LYNCH HAS ALSO SAID THAT HE WILL SEE PM COSGRAVE CONCERNING THE SPEECH.

6. NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL COMMENT ON ELECTIONS IS AS PESSIMISTIC AS GOI OPINION. LIKE GOI, NEWSPAPERS HAVE LONG CONSIDERED IT AN

ERROR FOR BRITISH TO HOLD AN ELECTION BEFORE MODERATES COULD RE-GROUP. PREDICTABLE OUTCOME OF ELECTION HAS INCREASED SUSPICIONS THAT BRITAIN IS LOOKING FOR A QUICK WAY OUT. "IRISH TIMES" EDITORIAL SAYS FLATLY THAT "BRITAIN HAS LOST THE WILL TO RULE NI."

7. DESPITE THE EXPECTED SETBACK IN ELECTIONS, GOI HAS SAID THAT IT PLANS TO CONTINUE PUSHING ITS BILL TO PROVIDE FOR EXTRATERRITORIAL PROSECUTION OF FUGITIVES FROM NI. BILL REMAINS HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL, BUT GOI NOW APPEARS LIKELY TO PASS IT BY A NARROW MARGIN. A FEW GOOD OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT PM COSGRAVE EXPECTS TO LOSE DAIL VOTE AND GO TO THE COUNTRY ON "LAW-AND-ORDER" ISSUE. OUR OWN GUESS IS THAT HE WOULD PREFER TO AVOID A GENERAL ELECTION AT THIS EXTREMELY TROUBLED TIME. IF BILL SHOULD BE DEFEATED IN DAIL, HOWEVER, HE MIGHT HAVE LITTLE CHOICE, AND HE HAS REASON TO FACE AN ELECTION WITH CONFIDENCE.

8. COMMENT: GOI IS CLEARLY CONFUSED IN ITS REACTION TO ELECTION RESULTS. MAIN PROBLEM, AS SO OFTEN IN THE PAST, IS THAT CRUISE-O'BRIEN HAS SPOKEN SOME TRUTHS WHICH MIGHT BETTER HAVE BEEN LEFT UNSAID FOR THE TIME BEING. AS FAR AS WE CAN SEE, HOWEVER, GOI IS CONFUSED ONLY IN ITS TACTICS, NOT IN ITS ANALYSIS. WE EXPECT THAT MAIN THRUST OF GOI POLICY WILL BE AIMED AT KEEPING BRITISH TROOPS ON THE SCENE UNTIL SOME INDEFINITE TIME IN FUTURE WHEN A STABLE POLITICAL SOLUTION CAN BE ACHIEVED. CRUISE-O'BRIEN'S COMMENTS SHOW THAT THERE IS REAL FEAR HERE OF UDI OR OF BRITISH ACQUIESCENCE IN A HARD-LINE REGIONAL PARLIAMENT, WHICH WOULD BE TAKEN HERE AS A SHORT STEP AWAY FROM UDI.

9. POWER-SHARING REMAINS, OF COURSE, AN ISSUE OF PIVOTAL IMPORTANCE, NOT SIMPLY A PLANK IN A PLATFORM WHICH CAN BE BARGAINED AWAY. WE CANNOT IMAGINE ANY STABLE SOLUTION THAT FAILS TO GIVE CATHOLICS A SHARE IN REAL POWER (OR FORCE THEM TO EMIGRATE, AS A VILENT ALTERNATIVE). THERE IS ROOM FOR MUCH BARGAINING ON THE TIMING
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AND FORM OF POWER-SHARING, BUT LOYALIST STATEMENTS UNTIL NOW HAVE GIVEN NO SIGN OF WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE BASIC IDEA OF POLITICAL POWER FOR THE CATHOLICS. IT IS EASY TO SEE WHY GOI IS IN A QUANDARY.
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